



interpeace

Local Ownership of Capacity Development

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Working with the Palestinian-Arabs in Israel

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY

Part 1. Background

Part 2. The Process

Part 3. The Palestinian-Arab Citizens of Israel- Internal Dialogue 2005-2010

SUMMARY

A strategic objective of any peacebuilding effort by outsiders should be to support and strengthen the local and national capacities for the non-violent management of deeply divisive issues. Outsiders typically engage in larger numbers in a country when the tensions have already spilled over into violence, signaling thereby an insufficiency in such local and national capacities. It would be a mistake, however, to therefore assume that there are 'no' capacities and that it is upon the outsiders to substitute for or to 'build' local capacities.

The prevailing paradigm among external 'assistance' actors is to first build or strengthen local capacities, and once this is done, to 'hand over' full ownership back to the local and national actors. While there definitely are situations in which this approach is justified, it cannot become a fixed sequence. Indeed, in many other situations local actors are well able to take full responsibility and ownership for the management of a process in which they have a strong interest and are able to identify for themselves any possible areas in which they need their capacities strengthened.

This is well illustrated by the following short case study of the Palestinian-Arabs in Israel. While Interpeace as an external organization acted as the initial catalyst and supported the project through methodological advice and fundraising, it was the Palestinian-Arabs in Israel themselves who very quickly determined their priority for an internal process and drove it themselves. In doing so, they strengthened their own capacities for constructive action.

PART I: BACKGROUND

Interpeace initiated peacebuilding work in Israel and among Israelis in late 2004. This was the outcome of some 15 months of extensive consultations and joint reflection with Israelis. They identified the internal fragmentation and divisions among Israelis, and the (self-) exclusion of politically significant groups of Israeli society from the peace processes, as important reasons for the lack of implementation of the 1993 Oslo peace accords and the lack of effectiveness of much peacebuilding work thereafter. Many of these peacebuilding initiatives were designed along 'people-2-people' principles, bringing together Israelis and Palestinians, but typically, they included only the moderates from the peace camps of both sides.

Hence the decision to have an intra-Israeli process (and a separate intra-Palestinian one) that would reach out to all sectors of society (including and especially the ones who did not take part in it in the past) and that would build, over time, some stronger internal convergence among Israelis. To make people think beyond the situation of 'today', beyond the fear and the mutual mistrust, it was decided to build a process around and towards the core question of "What is your geo-political vision for Israel in this region by 2036? For the future generation?"

A variety of initial experiences had signaled that divisions and differences among Israelis were quite profound and that cross-sector conversations from the very outset might be premature. Hence the decision to work first within specific sectors of Israeli society.

The State of Israel has been using the on-going Israeli-Palestinian conflict as an excuse not to deal with the challenges of the Palestinian-Arab indigenous minority (more than 18% of the total population), who, although officially having a full citizenship, are being treated inequitably in a country that intends to approve a constitution defining itself as a Jewish-Democratic State.

PART 2: THE PROCESS

Initial contacts resulted in

- The identification of a Palestinian-Israeli consensual leader, Shawki Khatib, who was at the time the Mayor of the Yafiya Municipality (for more than 20 years), the Chair of the National Committee of Heads of Arab Local Authorities and the Chairman of the Supreme Follow-up Committee of Arab Israelis. He was the leader who stood up during and after the 2000 clashes between the Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel and the Israeli police forces, when 13 Palestinian Arabs were killed, and he has been working since on rebuilding the trust between this community and the Government of Israel. Mr. Shawki Khatib decided to recruit a coordinator for our joint work. He had two candidates. One lady was a very politically oriented figure and the other was a professional facilitator. Mr. Khatib felt that because there will be so many politicians involved in the process, why not have at list one professional...So he has recruited Mrs. Ghaida Rinawi-Zoabi.
- An adaptation of the original focus of the intended process. Indeed the Palestinian-Israeli interlocutors made it clear before they could start thinking about and discussing their geo-political vision for 2036, the different groups from within this sector of the Israeli society would have to first figure out how they define their own identity within this region and within or without the State of Israel.

The first major outcome of the process was the December 2006 publication of the "Future Vision" declaration (for the Palestinian-Arabs in Israel, rather than a geopolitical vision for Israel in the region). This is being used as the legal support for a framework under which both the individual and collective

rights of Arab-Palestinians would be upheld such that true, participatory equality, substantive citizenship and access within Israeli society would be realized. Years of discrimination and misrepresentation have led the Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel to lose their trust in the central Government of Israel and on their ability to influence it and therefore to transfer their trust and votes to the local municipal leadership. The data proves that less than 20% of this community uses their right to vote on the Israeli national elections but more than 75% vote in local elections. Following the publication of the “Future Vision” document (December 2006) by the National Committee of Arab local authorities it became clear that there is a gap of knowledge among the municipal leadership on what kind of democratic tools can be used by their community in order to be treated according to the rights provided to a minority in a democracy. Another outcome was the establishment of “Injaz” as the professional center for Arab local authorities. The legal, democratic setting that is being established these days by the Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel might be in the future put into use as a basis for implementation of civil rights for the entire Palestinian nation.

PART 3: THE PALESTINIAN-ARAB CITIZENS OF ISRAEL- INTERNAL DIALOGUE 2005-2010

The dialogue among the Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel was unique by being the first time that an internal discussion has taken place without any Jewish intervention and/or partnership. That became possible thanks to the UN umbrella provided by the programme.

The internal dialogue has also produced several achievements:

- **A proactive attitude** - The project has created and sustained, for the first time, a dialogue process that engages representatives of all the different sectors of the Palestinian minority (38 participants both women and men) with the clear intention of establishing a common agenda and strategy vis-à-vis the State through a deeper and more proactive engagement of the Palestinian-Israeli community in the discussion of political issues regarding their role and rights within the State. This was reflected in the call for a National Conference to take place in the later part of 2007, which was later transferred into a series of conferences. Each conference was on a specific subject that took place in 2007 and 2008.
- **An inclusive process** - For the very first time, the northern Islamic Movement, which does not acknowledge the authority of the Jewish State of Israel, has taken an active part in a process aimed at interaction with the State, sending the movement's third in command to serve as one of its official representatives in the meetings.
- **An enriched debate** - The process has broadened the options for peaceful and constructive engagement on the issue through the development of common position papers that unify the different groups on a range of topics. The document was first published in a press conference

in December 2006 and became the now famous 'Future Vision' document, with a long-term (20-year) horizon that includes seven position papers representing common positions (principles and goals) on the following topics:

- The relationship with the State and Jewish society
 - Formal and non-governmental organizational work
 - Economic and Developmental Growth
 - Land and Housing
 - Cultural and Social structure
 - Education
 - Legal Status of the Palestinian community in Israel
 - A joint Plan of Action for pro-active engagement with State, including in the ongoing debate around a constitution for the State
- **The reduction of incentives for violent action** - The strengthening of a constructive leadership and the provision of concrete avenues for engagement reduces the tendency to resort to violent protest as a means to promote political objectives. At the end of the Lebanon War, a time that the Arab sector felt the full force of discrimination, leaders of the sector chose to act in a new manner. Instead of strikes and demonstrations in the city streets, they submitted a detailed plan for the restoration and improvement of infrastructures, accompanied with an organized budget, to all the General Managers of governmental offices, including the General Manager of the Office of the Prime Minister. The promoters of the initiative were subsequently surprised by the positive reaction they received as a result.
 - **The reduction of asymmetries in the political dialogue** - The fact that the Arab minority brings to the negotiating table concrete, substantive proposals reduces the gap between the weak and the powerful in the debate. This increases the chance of delivering a viable constitutional solution, which will then be upheld by both sides, rather than a solution imposed by the majority through their superiority of resources and organization, and their control of the State apparatus, which bears no chance of withstanding the test of time.
 - **Empowering the Leadership** - The strengthening of the community's leadership in terms of their ability to overcome divisions, reach consensus on substantive issues, design constructive alternatives for political engagement, and effectively pursue institutionalized spaces for internal convergence, is expressed by the establishment of the following non-governmental organizations:
 - **DIRASAT** - (2007) The Arab Centre for Law and Policy which took the lead in the Arab Israeli engagement with the constitutional dialogue.

- **INJAZ** - (2009) The Arab Municipal Governance Center which took the lead in an empowerment process of the local leadership of the Arab community.
- **Impacting the national agenda and influencing policy** - Placing the issue of the relationship between the Arab minority and the Jewish State and society at the centre of the national political agenda and re-launching a renewed dialogue on the role and rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel in key political circles can be made evident by the following examples:
 - **A joint tabling to the Knesset** - by members of the Hadash (Arab communist party) and Shas (ultra-Orthodox Jewish party) parliamentary groups to discuss the full report emerging from the process.
 - **A meeting convened by Prime Minister Olmert** - with members of the “Future Vision” group that took place in May 2007.
 - **A Prime Minister’s Convention for the Arab Sector** - that took place in Haifa in July 2008 lead by Prime Minister Olmert. All the recommendations and decisions of this convention were espoused by the Government lead by Netanyahu.
 - **The First Arab Minister** - was appointed in 2007, becoming the first Arab to be appointed minister in the State of Israel since its inception. MK Raleb Majadele was appointed as the Labour Party's seventh minister. He became the Minister of Science, Technology, Culture, and Sports.
 - **The Nakba in the curriculum** - For the first time ever, reference to the Nakba (Arabic word for 'catastrophe', the name given by the Palestinians Arab in Israel to the creation of Israel on April 15, 1948) in the official learning materials at schools throughout the State of Israel.
 - **Arab Military Secretary to the President of Israel** - the appointment of the first Druze officer in the rank of Brigadier General as Military Secretary to the State President.
 - **5,000 more classrooms to the Arab sector**- After years and years of pleading finally in 2007, 5,000 classrooms were built within the Arab towns and villages all around Israel.
 - **The Authority for the Economic Development** - The Authority for the Economic Development of the Arab, Druze and Circassian Sectors was established by power of a Government Resolution (No. 1204, February 15, 2007). The purpose of the Authority is to maximize the economic potential of the Arab, Druze and Circassian population by encouraging economic and business activity within the Arab, Druze and Circassian communities, and integrating them into the national economy.
 - **New Venture Capital for the Arab community in Israel** - The Government provided 80 million NIS out of 117 million NIS - In February 2010 Pitango Venture Capital won a governmental bid and launched a new venture capital fund that will operate in the

Israeli-Arab community. The fund is called Al-Bawadir ("buds" in Arabic). Al-Bawadir will invest NIS 177 million in Arab-Israeli ventures. The Government provided NIS 80 million, and Pitango, along with private investors, provided the rest.

- **An Arab Mayors' convention** - In December 2009, a 3 day convention took place in order to deal with the current municipal problems and goals for the future of the Arab local authorities in Israel.
- **Governmental investment of 800 million NIS in the Arab sector** - In March 2010 the Government approved a perennial program for economic development in Israel's Arab sector. The program at an estimated total cost of 800 million Shekels – half of which will be funded by sources from the Ministry of Finance – will be implemented over the course of five years in 10 cities whilst focusing on three main areas: occupational development at a cost of 220 million Shekels, upgrading transportation within and outside the cities at a cost of 100 million Shekels, and developing lands for condominium complex on administration land and private land at a scope of approx. 15,000 residential units with an investment of 316 million Shekels. In addition, the Government will invest about 150 million Shekels in operating the “City without Violence” program in these cities, aiming to improve services offered to residents and reinforce the ties between the community, enforcement authorities and the police. The program will be implemented in Nazareth, Sakhnin, Shfar'am, Umm al-Fahm, Kalanswa, Majar, Tamra, Tirah, Kfar Qasim and Rahat.

These different achievements can also be verified through an impressive number of press articles, interviews and opinion pieces related to the “Future Vision” document and its effects in both Israeli and international press (The Economist, BBC, The New York Times and International Herald Tribune). It can also be corroborated through the publication of the document on several websites of Arab-Israeli organizations. The materials prepared by the project and interviews with the participant actors and facilitators will also provide necessary information on these achievements.

All these documents are available upon request from the Assistant Programme Coordinator, Zachi Gabay at zachi.gabay@undp.org or directly from Ghaida Rinawi-Zoabi at ghaida.injaz@gmail.com.